

AS P/HARCOURT CRISIS CLAIMS 18 MORE LIVES...

Militants Defy Okiro, Azazi, Bomb NNPC, Radio Stations

• *Senate President condemns criminal activities in N/Delta*

Despite the presence of the Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant General Patrick Azazi and the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro in Port Harcourt yesterday to

*From Ahamefula Ogbu in Port Harcourt
and Chinedu Eze in Lagos*

dialogue on the security situation in the state, militants defied increased military and police presence to

wreak havoc on the city. At least 18 people were killed in the fresh onslaught while the River State owned

broadcasting station and an NNPC mega fuel filling station were destroyed with explosives and gun fire.

But in his reaction to the development, Senate President David Mark told journalists in Lagos that resort to criminal activities would not solve the problems in Niger Delta. He said the criminal elements would be isolated and dealt

with accordingly.

Among the early victims of the heavy shooting in Port Harcourt yesterday were three mobile policemen who were going for early morning duty and ran into the rampaging militants at Trans Amadi. They were shot and killed in front of BEWAC industries premises.

The bombing of the

Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) mega station inside the town saw most of the 16 fuel dispensing pumps destroyed as the militants detonated explosives on each pump before leaving the place non-functional.

Thereafter, they shot about five people near Lagos Bus Stop, killed

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THE LION AND JAWARA...



ECDA Demolishes Abuja

PORT HARCOURT CRISIS WORSENS

another five inside town by the Mega station before storming Radio Rivers where they shot a security man on duty adjacent the station before spraying the offices with bullets.

Their attempt to take out the transmitters of the Station were however not successful. The militants then vent their anger on a bus belonging to the station. They sprayed the automobile with bullets and left before additional securitymen arrived to challenge them.

Casualties were also recorded at Garrison where a Mobile policeman and a civilian were shot, a situa-

tion which brought the ever busy junction to a standstill.

Vehicles struggling to escape the shooting crashed into each other while the cultists detoured and headed towards Waterlines.

At Waterlines, pandemonium broke out when the cultists threw dynamites which exploded with loud bangs, causing activities to grind to a halt. In the process, many passers-by were seriously injured.

When THISDAY visited Braithwaite Memorial Hospital, no fewer than 15 corpses had been deposited in the hospitals mortuary. Shooting continued till evening in Rumuola and Mile 3 areas of the Sstate capital.

Luck was said to have run out on a group of the boys terrorising the town when their vehicle, a Toyota Corolla ran into a road block set up by soldiers who opened fire on them and killed five of the occupants of the vehicle.

The securitymen recovered an AK47 rifle with live ammunition and posters of a former lawmaker from the vehicle. Pools of blood were still visible at the scene. The shooting when the vehicle went to sight the vehicle which at the time of filing this report had been moved to a police station.

By yesterday's eve-nig,

soldiers had fully taken over the dangerous areas especially around the Government House where the attackers had constantly operated in the past three days.

They also carried self propelled grenades on launchers and advised road users to move slowly and desist from panic action. Intermittently, gun shots were heard with insistent rapidity.

However, IGP Okiro assured that though the situation was serious, it was not out of control as the presence of himself and Azazi in the State was a confirmation that they had already commenced action to contain the situation.

"We want to confront these hoodlums head on. On the lawlessness we see in Port Harcourt, we are here to make sure that it is stopped. The hoodlums have been confronted by the JTF today. The mere fact that we are here should tell you that the Federal Government has already taken action", he assured.

He said after a 45-minute closed door session held to assess the situation by security chiefs in Port Harcourt, they had mapped out appropriate strategies to deal with the situation which he described as a fall-out of clashes by rival cult

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gangs.

Like Okiro, the Rivers State Government also yesterday rejected the call for declaration of state of emergency and described those canvassing the idea as disgruntled elements.

Mr. Segun Owolabi, Manager of Rhythm FM was invited by the security agencies to answer questions on why he allowed some views calling for state of emergency to be aired on the station.

He told us that "men of the SSS came to my office and wanted to force me to follow them. They said I allowed views on the station calling for the declaration of state of emergency at a programme I hosted where the panelists aired their views".

Owolabi said he also hosted another programme where the government defended its positions and programmes and wondered why he would be arrested.

Meanwhile, the Senate President on his arrival yesterday at the Murtala Mohammed Airport, Lagos, said those involved in criminality in Niger Delta would be dealt with accordingly. He said the government is doing all in its power to stem the tide of violence and warned that government will not tolerate criminality in the area or any other part of the country.

He disclosed that the Senate was well aware that criminal acts have usurped the genuine agitation for resource control but added that the situation would be well taken care of.

"It is pure criminal act, which will be handled and treated like criminal cases, but where there are genuine complaints they would be looked into. Government is doing something about that", he said.

The senate president further said the senate was working closely with the executives to calm the nerves of the agitating parties and is currently discussing with various groups to make sure that the bad situation does not continue.

"We are talking with various groups. Those that are involved, government is engaging them in a discussion and we are trying to tell everyone to come to the table for discussion rather than adopting violence that doesn't help", the Senate President also said.

He also condemned the deplorable state of the Benin-Ore road, stating that the Senate has expressed its disappointment on the state of Nigerian roads on several occasions, especially the Benin-Ore road and urged government to do something urgently to alleviate the suffering of the people.



PENDENCE DAY

brate the
dia's Independence Day,
emony will take place
sday, the 15th August 2007
mission of India,
Off Yedseram Street,
na, Abuja
AND
gh Commission of India
scent, Victoria Island, Lagos.

AND FRIENDS OF ORDIALLY INVITED

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